farmers cooperating

"This is 'one-chance' land. If you don't get on it at the right time and do the job right first time then you've basically had it for the season," states Suffolk farmer Andrew Maddever, who in April 2012 took delivery of the UK's first Case IH Quadtrac 600 to help him do just that.

Replacing a previous Quadtrac 450 which had completed more than 4500 hours in five years, the Quadtrac 600 didn't turn a track in anger until July. But between the 11th of that month and mid-October when most of the autumn workload was finished it clocked up more than 1000 hours, an amazing tally for such a powerful tractor with an incredible appetite for work. During that time the 600 has been exemplary in its performance and reliability.

RH Maddever Farms, a partnership between Andrew, his father Hugh and mother Ann, has been a Member of ATLASFram since 1960 and now purchases all fuel, seed, fertiliser agrochemicals and other inputs through the Group, as well as utilising the Marketing Department's pools to market oilseed rape and wheat. It was through the ATLASFram Machinery Scheme that the Maddevers purchased the new Quadtrac, using it to obtain a significant additional manufacturer's rebate over and above the discount from dealer Doe Power in Sudbury.

Since July, this powerhouse has proved its worth on the heavy land which the family farms on eight units within a 10-mile radius of their Hall Farm at Whepstead, encompassing a mix of owner-occupied and contract-farmed land together with a small acreage of stubble-to-stubble contracting. All field operations are carried out by Maddever Contracting Limited, which works solely for RH Maddever Farms.

New concept
The Maddever's first Quadtrac experience came in 2006 with a demonstration, by Doe Power, of a 450hp version, which they liked because its four-track design avoided the "scuffing" which occurred on headlands with their existing Challenger 55 and 95E, as well as giving better traction.

Their decision to purchase the machine directly from the United States was made purely on the back of a favourable exchange rate, $US1.95 to the Pound, which produced a large enough saving to pay for a new Vaderstad drill to go behind the tractor. Although Case IH dealer, Doe Power at Sudbury, missed out on the sale they looked after the tractor 'in exemplary fashion', according to Andrew Maddaver.

In 2011, when the time came to replace the five-year-old 450, the Maddevers would not have looked to buy from anyone else.

Continued on page 5
Do Clouds have Silver Linings?

Asks Andrew Band, as he offers a ray of winter sunshine.

2012 has been well documented as a year where clouds or more specifically the rain they have brought has had a significant influence on farm outputs. Strong crop prices will mitigate some of the impact on revenues but high input costs are likely to result in an overall decline in farm profitability.

On the back of that, is it likely that those clouds do in fact have a silver lining which surprisingly could come via the tax system?

For the unincorporated farmers a tax payment is due on January 31, 2013. Part of this will be a Payment on Account (POA) based on the 2011-12 tax year. This was generally a healthy year for farm profitability and it is therefore likely that a sizable tax liability existed. As 50% of this liability forms the basis for determining the POA, this is also likely to have a significant bearing on this payment.

Faced with lower taxable profits resulting from the 2012 harvest reducing 2012-13 tax liabilities, it may be possible to defer some or all of this tax due at the end of January.

Further tax planning opportunities exist for the unincorporated farmer through being able to average out farm profits from one year to the next. Potentially this averaging process offers a way to shift those profits, possibly taxed at higher rates, to a year where only a basic rate liability exists so saving 20% tax in the process.

For those unfortunate enough to actually incur losses then there are even more options available. Some individuals may have other income streams and those trading losses can be offset against other income generated in the same year. However, it is more likely a better tax advantage can be obtained by carrying those losses back to earlier years. In this way it is possible to obtain a tax refund at the same rate as the tax was paid in that earlier year - 40% or for a few, even higher. This may also affect the timing of Payments on Account for later years, helping cash flow. It is a matter of planning correctly and reacting at the appropriate time because, ultimately, this tax will be payable.

For those structured through limited companies the POA regime does not exist but the ability to carry back trading losses does. These organisations will also be able to obtain tax refunds but only at the rate applied when their Corporation Tax was paid.

Is this really a silver lining?
No one wants to experience reduced profit levels or worse still, losses. However, the reduced cash outflows or possibly even cash inflows that can be obtained from the tax system, when factored into farm budgets may allow sufficient surplus for a purchase of some of the new equipment on display at LAMMA’s 2013 show.

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Taking stock

As we approach the end of 2012 I am pleased to report that AtlasFram continues to go from strength to strength. Members who read our annual report will see that, despite significant challenges from the weather and volatile markets, we had another very successful year. The business turned over £169 million, an increase of £17 million, purchasing turnover increased by 9.2% and our financial reserves rose to over £2.5 million, the highest in the Group’s history and an excellent sign to suppliers of our financial strength.

Our success reflects the fact that we are a true cooperative which operates purely in the best interests of our Members and in an entirely transparent manner. Our unique area-based funding scheme means that, unlike many competitors, we do not make extra profit from Members as input prices rise, while our structure rewards those who have a strong commitment to the Group, thereby maximising the profitability of their individual businesses.

We remain committed to being the UK’s foremost farmer-owned purchasing and marketing cooperative, delivering the best service and information supported by the best value and advice to our Members. Going forward, I believe that during increasingly challenging times for our industry, membership of AtlasFram will become even more attractive to forward-thinking farmers.

Fascinating research

Saying that leads me nicely on to talking about a fascinating piece of quantitative research commissioned by Saturn Agriculture, in which AtlasFram partners with Dengie Crops and Woldmarsh Producers. With the purpose of investigating the future potential for Saturn, researchers questioned 297 farmers throughout England, of which 91 are members of Saturn, 79 belong to another buying group in the same region and 127 are not part of any buying group.

Its objectives were to:
- Quantify the factors driving cooperative membership
- Identify the current needs of a cooperative buying group and the services used
- Assess views regarding current services offered and levels of satisfaction
- Examine the requirements of a cooperative/buying group and opportunities for Saturn Agriculture

Whilst over 85% of those who took part regarded the dominant benefit of cooperative membership as harnassing collective buying power to obtain lower prices, a significant number of Members appreciated the additional benefits of group membership, most notably convenience, time saving, ease of payment and accounting.

What I find interesting is that the survey revealed that Saturn Members purchase a much higher percentage of their key requirements through their respective cooperatives compared with other buying groups. This includes the majority of their fertiliser, crop protection and fuel requirements, together with a much higher percentage of inputs such as seed, machinery spares and other items.

In addition to best prices, the key factors that encourage continued membership of the group are efficiency, trusted staff, long-term relationships and access to a wide range of products and services. This is really encouraging to see, demonstrating the value of our Member services and close relationships in addition to buying well on behalf of Members. Confirming our strategy of providing individual service with a personal touch, is the fact that 97% of AtlasFram Members prefer to contact a specialist buyer as opposed to a generalist who may know the farm but not specialise in a specific input. An encouraging 40% of AtlasFram Members are very interested in marketing their crops through the Group, underpinning our strategy and the success of the relationship with ADM, as well as giving us lots of headroom for growth in this department.

The survey reinforced Members’ high level of satisfaction with the support services provided by Saturn Agriculture and its member cooperatives. 91% of AtlasFram Members were highly satisfied that we achieve best prices and that staff were responsive, with 96% rating us very highly for staff accessibility and knowledge of the products being sold. 93% of Members were very satisfied with our invoicing and statement process. This supportive feedback is well deserved by my team of professionals in the office who are absolutely focused on delivering the very best Member service and value that they can.

This fascinating piece of research reinforces our belief that AtlasFram is heading along the right path and will be invaluable in shaping the future of Saturn Agriculture.

Richard Anscombe
Chief Executive
Tank-mixing Atlantis WG with a strong residual partner could increase your black-grass control by up to 15%*

At Bayer CropScience we don’t just provide products that offer unrivalled weed control; we offer invaluable advice too. To hit the optimum black-grass control timing and catch any late emergers, Atlantis WG should be combined with a residual tank-mix partner, such as Bayer’s new tank-mix of 0.3 L/ha of Liberator®.

The problem of black-grass is increasing year on year and so is its resistance to herbicides. To ensure your black-grass control strategy is up to the challenge, use Atlantis WG – the most effective post-emergence herbicide for black-grass in winter wheat.

Visit bayercropsience.co.uk/bgtf to get more expert advice from the Black-Grass Task Force.

* Bayer Trials. Atlantis® and Liberator® are registered trademarks of Bayer. Atlantis contains metosulfuron-methyl and iodosulfuron-methyl-sodium. Liberator contains flufenacet and chlorsulfuron. Always read the label and product information before use. Pay attention to the risk indications and follow the safety precautions on the label. For further information, please visit www.bayercropsience.co.uk or call Bayer Assist on 0845 8082886 / 01223 326044. © Bayer CropScience Limited 2012.

Billy Dobson, Arable Manager at Aldford Hall Farm part of Grosvenor Farms, Chester

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Right first time  Continued from page 1

However, whilst a demonstration of a new Quadtrac 450 in November 2011 left them ‘seriously impressed’ with the advances which had been made since they bought their machine, and was the preferred choice of the operators, they felt that more power would not go amiss.

“The Quadtrac had obviously taken a huge step forward since we purchased our original tractor,” Andrew explains. “It was very impressive and so we ordered a new Quadtrac 600.

Because all the work we intended to do with the tractor was ‘on the drawbar’ we specified it without a three-point linkage or PTO. We also declined the usual factory-installed AFS AccuGuide™ autoguidance system in favour of a Trimble FMX system because we wanted to use it with our Bateman RB35 and RB25 machines for variable-rate spreading.”

Latest technology
The Quadtrac 600’s 12.9-litre, six-cylinder diesel has a rated power output of 649hp at 2100rpm and produces a maximum of 670hp at 1900rpm, with up to 2848Nm of torque and a 40% torque rise. Designed by CIH and built by Iveco to deliver maximum productivity.

Operators benefit from Case IH Cab Suspension which incorporates shock-absorbing components at each corner to stabilise front-to-back, side-to-side and up-and-down movement, giving the operator a smooth ride regardless of the terrain. A combination of springs, pads and mounts fully isolates the cab from chassis-created vibrations, thereby avoiding repeated jarring and bouncing, allowing the operator to focus on the job and have more control over the tractor, without the fatigue and soreness that comes at the end of a long shift.

Multiple applications
Supplementing a Challenger 755B, as well as three wheeled tractors, the Maddever’s Quadtrac 600 operates with a number of implements.

Having traditionally ploughed to control blackgrass, Andrew Maddever says that there’s little evidence that levels of control benefited from this approach. Where possible, he therefore now prefers to use other methods, such as extended stale seedbeds and finer seedbeds to allow pre-emergence herbicides to work more effectively.

One of the implements used with the Quadtrac is a 6m Simba SLD600, which incorporates nine Pro-Lift hydraulic reset tines working at up to 300mm, together with a DD rear roller which leaves an excellent level finish while also performing an effective loosening operation. One row of serrated discs ahead of the tines and another row following the tines ahead of the DD roller chop and mix the surface trash. The SLD600 is also operated in combination with a 6.6m, 7.2-tonne Simba Cultipress, which cultivates levells and consolidates in one pass. Drilling is carried out using an 8m Vaderstad Rapid behind the Quadtrac.

The 600 has worked exceptionally hard, with cultivation operations being carried out by Simon Ranson and drilling by Matthew Camps. During the tractor’s first 800 hours of operation meticulous records were kept of fuel usage, which averaged 72l/hr, including all field and road work. Covering 50ha every 12 hours when pulling the Simba SLD600, the Quadtrac uses around 1000 litres of fuel, equivalent to 20 litres per hectare. AdBlue is used at the rate of one litre to every 16 litres of fuel and is supplied from a 250-litre tank.

Prior to the 2012 harvest Maddever Contracting ordered 100,000 litres of red diesel on a forward contract through AtlasFram, which purchases 45 million litres of fuel annually on behalf of its 1250 Members. This innovative initiative enabled Members to forward-order a specific quantity of red diesel at a specific price, £3.79 pence per litre, for delivery in July, August and September.

Prices on the spot market subsequently increased by 6ppl, saving those who participated almost 10% on their fuel costs.

Andrew Maddever has been very impressed by the Case IH Quadtrac 600.

Summarising his view of the Quadtrac 600, Andrew Maddever comments:

“One don’t get much opportunity to drive our latest Quadtrac, but it doesn’t take long to appreciate just what an excellent piece of equipment it is. Traction is superb and its manageable width makes it easy to move on the road, which is important for us. The tractor is fantastically comfortable, the cab is so quiet and the suspension system is just remarkable.

“The other astonishing thing is that the tractor is so quiet that you can stand next to it in the field and hardly notice it pass by. In the past we’ve sometimes had complaints from residents when working late at night, but despite its massive power you hardly hear the Quadtrac. It glides over the field making very little noise, which is a big plus point as far as we are concerned. The other big bonus is the Xenon lighting, which is exceptional and makes working after dark so much easier, less stressful and far less tiring.

“At the moment there is nothing else on the market to touch the Quadtrac.”

Further details about the AtlasFram Machinery Scheme from Jon Fovargue on 01728 727700.

Four, wide, independent track sets allow the Quadtrac 600 to float over fields with remarkable agility.
AtlasFram Member Jonathan Bubb tends a rather special crop of winter wheat on his family’s Shropshire farm with meticulous, somewhat unusual care, which is understandable because this year it featured at both the Olympic and Paralympics Games, together with the Queen’s Jubilee ceremonies.

Chosen for its modest flag-leaf, the wheat is grown for floral displays and bouquets. Picked green before the ears have formed, it is then dried as part of the family’s Shropshire Petals business, operated alongside potato, wheat and oilseed rape production on 1400 acres.

“The variety is JB Diego, the same as the rest of the wheat acreage, which we buy through AtlasFram,” explains Jonathan who farms with his father Michael and brother James as J.M. Bubb and Son. As well as the conventional crops he masterminds the growing of 10 acres of flowers for natural confetti, plus the wheat which runs to four acres.

“We use this variety because the flag leaf doesn’t dominate. Appearance is so important that it has to be completely disease-free, so it gets Rolls Royce treatment and I generally have to use more sprays. It’s also sown in wider rows and picked with an old leek harvester.”

As specialist growers the Bubbs were asked to provide the wheat for the 4800 bouquets handed to every Olympic and Paralympic award winner at the ceremonies.

Wheat has become very popular for decorative use and the 30 workers employed also make it into stooks for country weddings.
Supply chain cooperation benefits all

Supplying a crop protection product, particularly a new one such as Seguris, starts well before it arrives on farm. Sue Lightfoot, customer service and supply lead for Syngenta, explains how AtlasFram and Syngenta benefit from working together.

Dealing with a global company offers multiple benefits. As well as knowing that investment is going back into research to provide new solutions - Syngenta invests $1b in R&D annually and it is increasingly challenging to bring new products to market - you are also working with a company that uses global purchasing to produce the right product, of the right quality, at the right time.

Providing these benefits is something we take seriously. Producing a crop protection product requires multiple steps – from sourcing raw materials; manufacturing active ingredients; formulation; packing; warehousing and finally distribution to customers. It’s similar with seed – with quality checked at every stage.

Both are highly involved processes. Especially when you realise that:

- We offer around 1200 product lines globally (110 crop protection treatments plus 350 seed varieties in various pack size permutations in the UK alone)
- European production is coordinated across three active ingredients - manufacturing sites and six formulation and packing sites (e.g. Grangemouth, which produces azoxystrobin)
- Recipes are complex – e.g. approaching 100 constituents in the potato blight fungicide Revus
- Products manufactured in one country might be used across Europe – so several markets may need them at the same time
- Like farmers, we have to respond to the biggest challenge – the weather – which can lead to sudden demand or to product no longer required.

Managing all this to have a product delivered to a particular location, on a particular day takes huge planning. It’s the job of the Syngenta global supply chain team.

How we do it

- We plan up to 36 months ahead. We have to – the approximate lead-time for a forecasted finished product is four weeks, but for un-forecasted demand it can be longer. For an active ingredient it can be up to six months.
- We base annual planning on an ‘average’ year – but review monthly to have flexibility for the highs and lows.
- Planning starts at a country level and moves up through to region all the way to the global team and we review this every month.
- To allow capacity at peak times, we produce certain products ahead of when needed. We also use seven day a week production and toll manufacture to meet demand
- For key products, we manufacture every two weeks rather than once or twice a year
- We plan new product introductions especially carefully – e.g. we had Bontima available within weeks of registration being received.

How we both benefit by working together

Ultimately, the key to product availability is excellence in forecasting.

Forecast early

We like forecasting to be two-way. We share our assumptions with customers and like them to give us feedback in return.

Challenges can arise when people forecast with several manufacturers to cover all possibilities, then don’t commit to forecasts or switch at the eleventh hour.

Feed back promptly

Update us monthly – so that we can respond. For example, is that disease pressure increasing or is another manufacturer running out? That way, we can fine-tune supply.

One example was when we had to massively increase Revus availability for potato blight in 2012. We could do this partly because we were able to redeploy product from elsewhere.

Be honest

A key challenge is knowing when to decrease supply as well as increase it. Sometimes people switch into other treatments on price. Product decisions shouldn’t be all about price (factors such as quality, technical back-up, packaging benefits such as S-Pacs, and investment in future research are all key). But if customers are switching, we would rather know in good time.

Not telling us could mean we keep manufacturing something that’s no longer needed, leaving no production capacity for a product that desperately is.

Our aim

Overall, our aim is that by working closely and openly together, everybody gains.

Sue Lightfoot, UK and Ireland customer service and supply lead for Syngenta

Bontima®; Revus® and Seguris® are registered trademarks of a Syngenta Group company.

Bontima (MAPP No. 14899) contains cyprodinil and isopyrazam; Revus (MAPP No. 13484) contains mandipropamid, Seguris (MAPP No. 15246) contains epoxiconazole and isopyrazam.

Use plant protection products safely. Always read the label and product information before use. For further product information including warning phrases and symbols refer to www.syngenta-crop.co.uk
‘TRAMLINE’, a new national scheme to promote the merits of independent agronomy, encourage new talent into the sector and secure a sustainable future for independent agronomy, has been launched by AtlasFram Group and the Association of Independent Crop Consultants (AICC).

Designed to create accessible pathways into this vital sector by providing individuals with the professional support and advice they need, TRAMLINE is aimed at those who would have to meet the requirements for AICC membership. They include farm managers looking to change career, newly-qualified agronomists who want to start their own business and existing agronomists wishing to transfer to the independent sector.

The scheme will offer discounted AICC Membership, access to independent regional trials data, contact with a network of mentors, together with opportunities to work with established agronomy providers. It will also encompass a package of business support provided by the AtlasFram Group, including an overview of the sector, together with advice on a range of issues, from business registration, telecommunications, email, websites and HR issues to guidance on tax and legal issues provided by external stakeholders.

“We believe that it is vital for farmers to have access to a healthy, commercially-independent agronomy sector to ensure that they receive a ‘fair deal’ when purchasing crop inputs, states Richard Anscombe, AtlasFram’s Chief Executive.

“That depends on being able to separate agronomic advice from product purchases, which is why the role of the independent agronomist is so important. The problem currently facing the agricultural industry is that the average age of independent agronomists is similar to that of farmers, namely in the mid-to late-50s. It is therefore important that AtlasFram helps to promote independent agronomy and attract new talent into the profession to ensure the sector continues to flourish.”

Mike Warner, Chairman of the AICC, adds: “We are delighted to be working alongside the AtlasFram Group to promote this new initiative because as manufacturers and distributors become larger and increasingly global in their outlook so the influence and purchasing power of individual farmers is diluted. It is vital that they have access to agronomic advice which is completely independent of any commercial bias to enable them to purchase the products that are best suited to their individual requirements, at the best possible prices through organisations such as AtlasFram.”

Further details are available at www.agronomytramline.co.uk or contact:
- Peter Waite, Crop Protection Products Manager, AtlasFram Group
  T: 01728 727700 E: peter.waite@atlasfram.co.uk
- Mike Warner, Chairman, AICC
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Innovative AD project will make business more resilient

Six AtlasFram Members in Suffolk have developed a unique anaerobic digestion (AD) facility which will eventually generate sufficient power to supply their own crop marketing company and local businesses.

High and volatile energy prices were the catalyst for the formation of Agrigen, a unique AD facility which has been developed as a stand-alone business by 3Ms, a produce marketing company formed 12 years ago by AtlasFram Members who farm adjoining land on the Suffolk Heritage Coast.

Based at Bentwaters Park, the former United States Air Force facility, the company came into being after Branston, one of the UK’s biggest potato buyers, packers, distributors and marketers contacted the three original members - Peter Waring Ltd, A. W. Mortier (Farms) Ltd and P.R.C. & C.M. Westrope - regarding supplies. Already friends, they decided to adopt a single supply position and committed to forming 3Ms.

The objective was to market potatoes and other root vegetables produced by the three farming companies, whose principals played golf together in a group nicknamed ‘The Three Musketeers’, subsequently abbreviated to 3Ms. Peter Waring Ltd stopped producing root vegetables in 2002 but Capel St Andrew Farms joined the following year, Wantisden Hall Farms in 2004, Mann Potatoes not long after, followed by R.H Paul.

Farming 12,000ha, they produce 120,000 tonnes of fresh vegetables annually, including potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips and turnips. 3Ms is managed by John Patrick who previously worked for Warings, and Graham Thorne who managed potato and root crop production for P.R.C. & C.M. Westrope.

“3Ms was formed by a group of very professional farmers who have chosen to cooperate for mutual benefit and work entirely on trust,” explains Graham Thorne. “We exist solely to market crops produced by Members, which are all family-owned businesses that take a long-term outlook. We neither trade nor speculate in the market and have a very good reputation for supplying high-quality produce on time. Our brief is also to seek expansion and new profit opportunities which are sympathetic to the long-term interests of the individual farming businesses, for the benefit of future generations.

“Five years ago, the combination of relatively static prices for produce and rapidly increasing energy costs was squeezing margins. High oil prices affect not only fuel costs but everything else which uses energy, from the electricity used to dry and store produce to pesticides and fertilisers, so we decided to investigate ways to make the business more resilient to energy cost fluctuations.

“Having considered all the options we focused on developing an AD plant, using bi-products from our vegetable operations and specifically-grown feedstock crops to produce electricity and heat, as well as providing the ability to recycle carbon and even produce fuel for road vehicles.

“We studied the position in Germany, where they are much more advanced in renewable energy, and identified an Austrian company which specialises in manufacturing plant to handle high-energy waste, produces the complete system in-house and has installed around 80 identical installations throughout Europe. There was a very strong synergy between our two businesses and we quickly decided to work with them.

“Planning took a year to complete and was both costly and difficult. Government delays in announcing the initial level of the feed-in tariff meant it was February 2011 before we found out that instead of the proposed 11.5p/kW we had used to cost our proposed 1.5mW plant the figure would actually be 9.0p/kW, compared with 13p/kW for schemes of up to 499kW.

“We came very close to scrapping the whole project, not just because the economics had changed but because our confidence in the Government’s long-term commitment to renewable energy was undermined. However, the higher tariff for smaller AD plants and our long-term goal of making the business more resilient to future energy price increases tipped the balance. We started by building a sub-0.5mW plant to qualify for the higher tariff but installed the infrastructure for a 1.5mW plant.

“Getting to where we are today has not been helped by the banks, which are still unwilling to lend money for new projects. Fortunately, we were able to raise capital to fund this project from the Members together with John and myself. We were therefore able to overcome what for many others would have been an insurmountable hurdle because we have all worked together for so long and built up a high level of trust.

“Funding from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) allowed us to install a nutrient handling and recycling system which enables clean water to be returned to a reservoir and used for crop irrigation, while solid material is used to produce compost which will eventually meet 5% to 6% of our member farms’ nutrient requirements. This is very important as they produce crops which are eaten raw, so slurry from livestock or processed human waste cannot be used. This means that fertiliser has to come from imported.

Continued on page 10
Further improve the efficiency of the business services we offer.

The IT project will benefit both Members and AtlasFram in different ways. It will:

- Provide Members with a high level of confidential information across all product areas direct to their office computer, iPad or smart phone through a highly secure, password-protected, Members-Only Area on the website.

- Further improve the efficiency of the AtlasFram office. Examples of this would be receiving invoices direct from suppliers electronically and automatically coding them by product area to allow detailed reporting for supplier negotiations. We currently receive almost 200,000 invoices a year by post, but only around 18,000 electronically. However, by Christmas this will increase to 36,000 with a further eight suppliers sending invoices electronically. We have an ongoing commitment to engage and connect electronically with all high invoice volume suppliers.

As well as using the latest technology to reduce ‘inbound’ paper and handling, we have also put large resources into giving farm offices the opportunity to receive statements and copy invoices electronically. The ability to forward these to remote offices, contract farming accounts and so forth will be equally as important. With HMRC accepting that such information is held on the office computer in the future, the comment of ‘passing on of the printing’ to the Member is not our intention. At any time all your account records are backed up and accessible via the AtlasFram office.

The Members’ Area of the new website will also have a fully-integrated ‘on-line’ ordering facility, allowing farm businesses to place orders directly from the farm office or field, at any time. All orders will be verified and confirmed with the supplier internally. If your business knows exactly what it requires, placing orders electronically makes a massive difference to the running cost of your cooperative. To back this up, accurate market information and trends will be available through the site to aid your decision making.

AtlasFram appreciates that investment in such systems and processes will not change farming business processes overnight, but the way that business is now being performed globally, and increasingly electronically, makes it important that we engage with this change. We will support the introduction of this new technology within AtlasFram by holding IT workshops and update sessions.

Ashley Gilman,
Group Business Manager
AtlasFram Member John Taylor has doubled his Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser tonnage for 2013.

John Taylor used innovative Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser for the first time during 2012 on the 1200ha of arable land he manages from Grove Farm, Clotton, Suffolk. He chose this form of nitrogen because of its well-established practical and agronomic advantages over ordinary urea and ammonium nitrate (AN).

With 46% N compared to 34.5% N for AN, Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser offers more efficient spreading, less packaging waste and is exempt from the transportation and storage burdens of AN.

“I was really pleased with how the Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser performed and delighted with the results in terms of crop yields and quality,” John stated. “Considering that the weather during the season was the worst for 30 years, we were very fortunate compared with many others around the country.

“Conditions last autumn were very kind, crops established well and we were able to apply nitrogen quickly because it is significantly more concentrated in Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser than AN. The nitrogen spread very well and was available to the plants immediately, giving them a boost at just the right time before it rained almost every day through to June.

“We used Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser on all our wheat and the average yield for first and second crops was 9.68t/ha, almost spot-on our five-year average. In the same fields, using Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser produced yield and grain protein equal to AN, which was our performance benchmark.

“Nitrogen is particularly important on the milling wheats which we grow. Undoubtedly we benefitted from Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser, as we were able to get more nitrogen on at the optimum time.

“All the Group 1 milling wheat acreage was sown with ‘Gallant’ in the second-wheat slot. It averaged 9.5 t/ha at 14% moisture, 12.7% protein and with 287 Hagberg. It passed the DON (deoxynivalenol) test for mycotoxins with flying colours and we were able to sell 700 tonnes at £222/t, a £30/t premium over feed. By separating all our Group 3 soft milling wheats, Target, Warrior and Scout, we were able to achieve an average £15/t premium.

“With the mills we deliver to being more than 100 miles away in Northamptonshire it is essential that we supply only product which will make the grade, as rejections are costly.

“In May, I placed my order for my 2013 nitrogen but won’t actually take delivery and use it until next April. Working that far ahead I can’t hope to know what the weather will be like then, so being able to rely on Koch Advanced Nitrogen® fertiliser to perform gives great peace of mind and enables me to manage risk more effectively.”

R.A.B.I - the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution - is a grant-making charity which gives confidential help to farming people in financial difficulty.

Founded in 1860, it helps working farmers and farm-workers on a short-term basis, for example following illness, accident, bereavement, family breakdown, or animal disease, and offers long-term help to elderly people and disabled people of all ages.

Support includes State Benefits’ advice and one-off or regular grants, including winter heating supplements and help with utility bills and telephone charges. It can also pay for things like disability equipment, essential household goods and hospital travel costs.

Though R.A.B.I does not pay business bills, it can pay for relief farm staff if, for example, someone is unable to work through illness or that of a close member of their family.

It can pay for help from the Institution of Agricultural Secretaries and Administrators to get paperwork and accounts in order, while its Gateway Project pays for training to allow people to develop skills they can use to get off-farm work to supplement their income.

The charity can also help with care home fees/home-help costs and runs two residential homes of its own.

R.A.B.I supports more than 2000 farming families a year with grants of around £2 million. Most of its work is funded by public donations, money raised at events arranged by the charity’s volunteer county committees, and support from businesses and community groups.

To find out more, visit www.rabi.org.uk or call R.A.B.I’s confidential helpline 0300 303 7373.
Putting Health & Safety first

The recent Members’ survey highlighted that many of you would like more help in complying with health and safety obligations. AtlasFram’s Special Interest Group, comprising CEO Richard Ancombe, Member and Director Christopher Padfield, together with Louise Tupman, Human Resources Consultant have identified two companies specialising in health and safety issues in the agricultural sector.

“The agricultural industry is one of the most dangerous industries in which to work,” explains Louise Tupman. “Every day farmers and their staff face a wide range of hazards, from machinery and chemicals to livestock and equipment. The situation is complicated by the fact that many of those who work on farms do so on a part-time or casual basis.

Hannah Dodds, Regional Risk Control Executive, NFU Mutual

“The latest report from the Health & Safety Executive for 2011/2012 shows that there were 33 fatal injuries to workers in the agricultural industry. The average fatality rate is 9.7 per 100,000 employees, the highest of all industries apart from mining and quarrying. Almost half of those fatally injured were farmers, 21% farm workers and 6 were members of the public.

“New cases of work related ill-health within agriculture are almost twice the rate for all industries and the highest of the industry sectors. The rate of work-related musculoskeletal disorders, for example, is over three times the average, while dust from grain, cereals, feed or bedding is a significant cause of breathing/lung problems. These are worrying statistics.

“With the best interests of Members in mind, and as part of our Duty of Care responsibilities, we reviewed what health and safety services are currently available. We identified two companies as being specialist in the agricultural sector, each having a very different approach and offering services which suit different requirements.”

One of them is NFU Mutual Risk Management Services Ltd (RMS), of which Hannah Dodds is Regional Manager. She states:

“Every year a large number of employees are killed, maimed or suffer serious illnesses. Add to this the threat of non-compliance with Health & Safety legislation or prosecution for pollution and it’s easy to see how the associated costs could cripple your business. Good Risk Management makes excellent business sense, because as well as accident prevention and mitigation, it focuses attention, increases confidence and frees up your time to get on with core business activities.

NFU Mutual Risk Management Services Limited (RMS) is a fully independent risk management company, offering a health and safety consultancy service to help organisations identify, manage and minimise risk as well as comply with legislation. Its approach is to take an even more active role in preventing loss and disruption. By putting effective management systems in place, it can help to identify risks and help ensure things do not go wrong in the first place.

Founded in 1992, RMS is the largest provider of health and safety consultancy services to the rural sector, with over 5000 clients; and is not exclusive to those holding insurance with the NFU Mutual. It is uniquely placed to provide advice and assistance tailored to the specialist needs of the rural community. RMS’s key strength is its people. All 50 health and safety consultants have both agricultural and health and safety knowledge and experience; with the majority being Chartered Members of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (CMIOSH) and appearing on the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OSHCR).

RMS offers a wide range of flexible, cost effective products and services, including: health and safety support service, health and safety training, fire risk assessments, food safety management and asbestos surveys. Working with AtlasFram, three different health and safety support options are initially on offer to members, ensuring the right level of service and help, no matter how large or small your business. All services are available nationwide, at competitive rates.

Option 1: VQ Level 2 Award Safe Working in Agriculture and Production Horticulture

A one-day course aimed at all those working in these sectors it costs £100 + VAT per delegate.

Option 2: Health & Safety Workshops

This one-day practical workshop for owners/managers/employees who manage in-house health and safety procedures on small to medium-sized farms costs £250 + VAT per delegate

Option 3: Health & Safety Support

Aimed at medium to large farms, this comprehensive and confidential consultancy service, which costs from £1950 + VAT, covers a wide range of health and safety issues and will help Members to improve their health and safety performance. An RMS consultant will meet with you to identify issues affecting your business, undertake a detailed hazard spot exercise across your work areas, and suggest practical solutions. They will also begin to produce the key paperwork required by law, all aimed at ensuring you provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment for employees, contractors and members of the public. A programme of on-going help and support will ensure that you are kept updated with the ever-changing legislative requirements.

For more information or to reserve a place on one of the training days please contact Becky Collen on 07814 130920 or email: becky_collen@nfumutual.co.uk

Safety Revolution can be contacted on 01993 220266 (Oxford office) or 01354 694222 (Chatteris office)

Training opportunities

Health and Safety Workshop – Tuesday 12th February 2013
AtlasFram office, Framlingham 10am - 4pm.

Aimed at anybody with responsibility for managing health and safety, including advice and help with complying with health and safety legislation, followed by a practical hazard-spotting exercise on a local farm.

All delegates also receive a health and safety advice manual and 12 months access to telephone support.

Cost £250 + VAT per delegate, payable in advance. Minimum of 5 delegates.

VQ 2 Working Safely in Agriculture Course – Wednesday 13th February 2013
AtlasFram office, Framlingham 9am - 5pm.

Aimed at anybody working within agriculture, from employees to management.

Those successfully completing the course will received a VQ2 qualification and 6 NRoSO points.

Cost £100 + VAT per delegate, payable in advance. Minimum 10 delegates.
Agrovista

Vigour and earliness
- key criteria for maize success

After a season in which so many maize crops failed to deliver, growers are being advised to focus on earlier varieties for 2013 to avoid a repeat performance. However, while there’s a raft of new, higher-yielding, ultra-early varieties to choose from, growers must take care because some don’t have the stability needed to cope, according to Agrovista Seeds Manager, Nigel Walley.

“Growers rightly need to select ultra-earlies for some of their toughest conditions and earliest drilling slots, aiming to gain from an earlier maturity and harvest date to enable following crops, such as wheat, to be drilled if required. Last year though, even some of the earliest of types struggled to compile starch in a summer where heat units were at a premium.

“The key differentiator between those that did and those that didn’t was their early vigour. Those with the highest vigour scores and an ability to get out of the ground and ‘going’ made all the difference. Launched last year and widely available this season, Ramirez is firmly in that category.

“With one of the highest vigour ratings in trials, it gained a head-start over others which simply germinated and then did nothing for two to three weeks. This meant that Ramirez could be cut early and on the back of its un-rivalled starch content is also offering early feed-out on farm.”

KWS maize product manager, John Burgess confirms that there’s been significant variation across trials this year, with the gap between the best and worst maize varieties being as much as 45%, rather than a more normal variance of 15%. Control varieties have also been some 2.5t/ha lower yielding.

While on marginal sites older standard varieties such as Avenir gave 90-93% yields, and current ultra-early market leader Kentaurus 103-106%, Ramirez did particularly well, producing yields of up to 110% of controls. Mr Burgess puts the performance of Ramirez down to its robust nature and stability under stress. He adds:

“Some other varieties are at the limit of the capabilities in UK situations and when they were hit with 2012’s extreme cold stress, simply broke down. Ramirez has an ability to better accept cold conditions and on the back of its vigour and earliness still piles on the starch for full on high energy performance. Indeed, in similarly difficult conditions in Denmark, Ramirez gave the highest starch content of all varieties in trial.

“So, while it is a variety for those in marginal areas, don’t ignore it elsewhere as a means of grabbing an early, high-energy bite which is ready to feed out in early October.”

Northern Trial: Ramirez (left) compared with a leading competitor ultra early variety – both under plastic – 3 weeks after drilling.

AtlasFram are already receiving new season variety offers from suppliers. The complexity and segmentation of varieties in this market is demonstrated in that last season AtlasFram supplied 58 varieties from 19 suppliers covering approx. 9000 acres with the trend to earlier, high-yielding varieties continuing. As well as Ramirez, other leading forage varieties with AtlasFram Members were Justina, P7892, Trozi, Cerutti, ES Ballade, MAS17E and PR39V43.

Whilst it will be a few weeks before we are in position to finalise member maize seed order forms it is well worth considering whether you wish to try any of the new varieties available.
Fertiliser pools help manage risk

Most farmers will be familiar with the concept and benefits of marketing grain through pools, but now AtlasFram has reversed this approach to enable members to purchase fertiliser.

Andrew Merton, AtlasFram’s Crop Inputs Manager, explains how it will work and what it hopes to achieve.

Since the ‘credit crunch’ began in 2007/2008 the financial and commodities markets have become exceptionally unstable and a general lack of confidence across all sectors has compounded the inherent volatility which has always been present.

Agricultural commodities now form one of the largest sectors in the commodity markets and with increased speculative activity now taking place it sometimes takes only the slightest rumour to send prices rocketing in one direction or the other. With an almost instantaneous flow of information circulating around the world this volatility will almost certainly continue and increase. Farmers will therefore need to change their approach to marketing what they produce and how they purchase the inputs they need to produce them, including fertilisers.

The fertiliser market used to be relatively stable and predictable. The new season market would typically start in June and discounts were available for early ordering, after which prices typically increased throughout the year. This trend has changed and with high levels of price volatility now characterising this sector it has become very difficult for farmers to know when to buy, and ordering early might not necessarily get you the best price.

With information on the fertiliser market being widely available and participants able to ‘buy in’ at the press of a button, prices can move very rapidly, so even if you were able to pick the exact ‘bottom’ in the market that price might be available for no more than an hour or two. Therefore, to benefit, you would have to monitor the situation constantly, which is unrealistic for most farmers.

Because there is no highly-developed futures market for fertiliser, as there is with grains and rapeseed, it is not possible to fix prices in advance, so we had to develop a new approach. Given AtlasFram’s strength in grain marketing, the popularity of our pools and their success in achieving above average prices, we decided to investigate whether similar principles could be used in the fertiliser market.

Following 18 months of research, early in the new year we will launch a unique fertiliser pool, which will be the first of its kind and offer significant benefits. The way it will operate is, in effect, a mirror image of a grain pool. Rather than selling grain progressively throughout the pool period when prices are considered to be at attractively high levels, with the aim of generating a good overall return, we will be purchasing fertiliser when we consider that prices are at attractively low levels, to ensure that we achieve a good overall average cost per tonne.

Initially, we have chosen to work with granular urea because it is very popular with AtlasFram Members, is traded globally and often sets the tone for all nitrogen fertilisers. In the UK, the annual market for granular urea is around 350,000 tonnes, of which AtlasFram purchases around 18,000-20,000 tonnes on behalf of Members.

The combination of our expertise in this market, our constant involvement in it and having a committed tonnage from Members will enable us to react quickly, buy when the price is right and negotiate with suppliers. This will enable Members who participate in the pool to benefit from attractive prices, reduce their exposure to volatile markets and have the reassurance of guaranteed delivery.

They will also benefit through significant time savings because we will monitor the markets, purchase the product on their behalf and issue a single invoice at the end of the pool period based on the average price per tonne, which will reduce administration. The fact that each Members’ urea tonnage will be purchased from the same supplier will also ensure that each tranche of product will be to the same specification, resulting in more consistent application and consequently better crop performance.

We will operate one pool, running from September to January and aim to accommodate Members’ delivery preferences. Payment will be divided between September and January in order to help with cash flow. The timing of purchases will involve a team consisting of both directors and staff, to form a fertiliser pool committee. Having this committee brings a wealth of knowledge to the table with the aim of getting the best results for Members.

Whilst we don’t expect Members to use this new pool for all of their urea requirements, we would suggest that they give this new initiative a try on at least a percentage of their tonnage to assess the benefits.

Further details from Andrew Merton, Crop Inputs Manager: Tel: 01728 727700 or email Andrew.Merton@atlasfram.co.uk
Amazone - Leading in the field

Amazone, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of harvest-to-harvest machinery, is highly respected for the innovation, quality, reliability, productivity and outstanding operational performance of its products, which benefit from excellent support, a reliable spare parts service and high resale values. The company offers a comprehensive range of fertiliser spreaders, crop protection sprayers, PTO-driven and non-powered soil tillage equipment, together with solo, precision and combination seed drills.

The UK is now the third-largest market for Amazone, after Germany and France, with sales and support of Amazone equipment here being handled by Amazone Ltd at Harworth in South Yorkshire, where the company has the facilities to show and demonstrate its equipment. Now in its 30th year, Amazone Ltd employs 28 staff, 18 of whom are field-based to ensure a high level of technical and product support, before, during and after purchase.

Amazone Ltd is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Amazone-Werke. A family business which was founded in Germany during 1883, Amazone-Werke is managed by Christian and Justus Dreyer, who are fourth-generation members of the Dreyer family and determined to maintain the independence of this successful company. Amazone has seven production facilities across Germany, France and Russia, with sales divisions in Germany, France, Poland, Ukraine, Serbia/Montenegro, Russia and the UK.

Employing approximately 1600 staff, the business has an annual turnover of €400 million and exports 80% of production to over 70 countries. Having been awarded 22 medals at the last seven Agritechnica exhibitions, Amazone is unquestionably the most innovative company in its sector, a philosophy which has enabled it to achieve a very strong position in the global market against much larger corporate competitors.

Since 2009, when Adrian Winnett became General Manager of the UK business, it has just concentrated on distributing Amazone’s own range of products, which are made in its own factories and manufactured right down to the smallest of components to maintain the quality on which the company has built its reputation. During the last three years sales have doubled and turnover is now at its highest ever in the UK company’s history.

“British farming leads the world and what happens here is a reference point for farmers throughout the world,” Adrian explains. “The world wants to know about British farming and the techniques that are used here, so it is crucial that we continue to develop the UK market for Amazone products. Our focus is on working with the most professional farmers and farming businesses, which is why we have chosen to work with AtlasFram.”

“To maintain our forward momentum we will be launching a number of exciting new products in 2013, at LAMMA, at Cereals and at Agritechnica.”

Developing range
The Amazone range is constantly developing: it’s innovative, green-and-orange-livered products being a familiar sight on arable and grassland farms throughout the UK, where the key product ranges are fertiliser spreaders, mounted sprayers and power harrow-drill combinations.

A cornerstone of the line-up are twin-disc fertiliser spreaders, either mounted with hopper capacities of up to 4200 litres or trailed machines up to 8200 litres, with spreading widths up to 52m. Amazone also produces dual-purpose bulk material spreaders for lime and fertiliser application. The wide range of Amazone mounted, trailed and self-propelled crop protection sprayers provide tank sizes from 900 litres to 11,200 litres, and working widths from 12m to 40m, with unprecedented boom ride qualities.

The company also offers a range of pneumatic precision air seeders from 3m to 9m, for maize as well as oil seed rape and sugar beet, where all models have the option of applying fertiliser as well as seed. For cereals, there is a comprehensive range of mechanical seed drills for solo operation or in combination with a power harrow. On the pneumatic seed drill front, again a range suitable for power harrow mounting as well as a massive array of trailed min-till cultivator drills, tine seeders and direct drills with working widths from 3m to 15m.

Packer rollers are available to suit every requirement, offering both depth control and reconsolidation, with cage, tooth-packer or wedge-ring roller configuration. The principle of ‘roll then sow’ is utilised in all drill combinations to enhance seed/soil contact and improve germination.

When it comes to stubble cultivation and soil tillage, Amazone’s range includes passive compact disc harrows and mulch cultivators through to tine-and-disc combination cultivators, Cambridge rolls, PTO-driven rotary cultivators and rotary harrows.

Amazone has long been a pioneer in the field of electronic technology, which has become an important part of intelligent crop production. Enabling more accurate, cost-effective application and regulation, they also considerably reduce operating costs, improve operator effectiveness, help optimise yield potential and minimise the impact of farming operations on the environment.

Further details about Amazone equipment are available at www.amazone.co.uk or contact Jon Fovargue at the AtlasFram office.
No matter where you grow your maize, switching to one of our ‘Top 4’ maize varieties will unlock the real potential of your maize land and your herd - outstanding yields, exceptional milking performance and the highest margins.

To find out more, talk to the maize experts on 01379 871073.

Bred for Britain by...